

The re-discovery of the Noisy Scrub-bird was the highlight of 1961. Mr. Harley Webster managed, after patient search, to find and obtain tape-recordings of the call of this bird, last seen in 1889 and previously believed by many ornithologists to be extinct. From his investigation of habitats it seems that this is a case where increased numbers of bush fires destroyed many breeding populations, leaving pockets of birds only in more isolated areas. A slow build up of population in these refuges eventually allowed a spillover of birds into other areas, thus leading to their discovery.

The Scrub-bird re-discovery highlights the interest of the Australian scene to the amateur ornithologist, where work of importance can be done by the keen worker.

Acknowledgement:

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The south-western races of *Eremomela icteropygialis* (Lafresnaye)

by J. M. WINTERBOTTOM

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Considerable controversy has arisen recently over the south-western races of *Eremomela icteropygialis* (Lafresnaye), different views on some aspects of the problem being expressed by Macdonald (1957), Clancey (1959, 1962) and White (1961). It seemed therefore worth while to review the whole matter with the aid of the collections in the South Africa, Durban, East London and Transvaal Museums and the National Museum of Southern Rhodesia, Bulawayo. I am much indebted to the Directors of these last four Museums and to Messrs. O. P. M. Prozesky and M. P. Stuart Irwin for the loan of material; and I must also thank Mr. P. A. Clancey for allowing me to see his 1962 paper before publication.

Before tackling the nomenclatorial problem, it seemed best first to determine how many races were involved. Five have been described from within South African limits, *icteropygialis* (Lafresnaye), 1839, said to be from the Orange River; *polioxantha* Sharpe, 1883, from Swaziland; *sharpei* Reichenow, 1905, from Windhoek; *saturationis* Ogilvie-Grant, 1910, from Deelfontein; and *perimacha* Oberholser, 1920, from the Asbestos Mountains, Griqualand West.

Of these, we can dismiss *polioxantha* in a few lines. It is quite distinct from the other southern populations of the species, the belly being a much deeper and brighter yellow. It ranges from Zululand, through Swaziland, the eastern Transvaal and Southern Rhodesia to north-east Bechuanaland Protectorate (Makarikari Pan and 99 miles south of Francistown) and northwards beyond our limits to Northern Rhodesia, southern Tanganyika, Nyasaland and Portugese East Africa (White, 1961).

The controversy exists about the **other** four races. Clancey (1959, 1962) believes that *perimacha* is synonymous with the type race and that the

birds of northern S.W. Africa constitute the paler *sharpei*. White (1961) regards *sharpei* as a synonym of *icteropygialis*; he does not discuss topotypical *perimacha* but uses this name for Bechuanaland birds, which implies that they are the same as those of Griqualand West, whereas Clancey (1962) considers them the same as those from northern S. W. Africa. Clancey (1959) also suggests that if western Orange Free State and Transvaal birds (for which the name *perimacha* has been widely used in the past) are actually distinct from *icteropygialis*, they will require a new name.

My first task was to find out how many races there are, before deciding what they ought to be called. For this, I had at my disposal 161 skins and, leaving aside five skins which obviously belonged to very distinct north-eastern *polioxantha*, the rest of the material fell very naturally into three groups, in which the breast grew darker and the belly duller as one proceeded from north to south (and east). The only serious gap in the series was for the Orange Free State, for which only three skins, one from Boshoff and the other two from Glen, near Bloemfontein, were available.

The palest series was from northern South West Africa and most of Bechuanaland Protectorate; perceptibly darker were birds from southern South West Africa, most of Griqualand West and parts of the north-western Cape. In the area between Windhoek and Ghanzi both forms occurred—one Ghanzi bird, indeed, could well have been placed in the succeeding series.

This third series of still darker birds, came from the Karoo and I was unable to separate most of the Transvaal skins from it. Some birds from the area Barkly West-Kimberley-Fourteen Streams agreed with this dark race and others fitted equally well into the lighter series. The western Free State bird was on the whole better placed with the lighter series; the others with the darker skins.

Skins from the northern and eastern Transvaal (Nelspruit, Mokeetsi, Woodbush, Nylstroom) showed the influence of *perimacha* in being decidedly paler on the breast and richer on the belly than the other Transvaal birds.

It is clear from the foregoing that my findings agree with Clancey's, as far as these latter go, but there remain nomenclatorial problems.

A good deal of uncertainty surrounds the type specimen of *Eremomela icteropygialis*, as was first pointed out by Macdonald (1957), who says: "there is inscribed on its label, in Lafresnaye's handwriting, the words 'des Elephants', which was crossed out and the words 'd'Orange' added. Lafresnaye in his description says, 'said to have come from the Orange River.' It is quite unlikely that the bird was taken on the Olifants River and it is doubtful if the species occurs along the Orange River anywhere much below Upington. The specimen was probably collected by Levaillant and it might easily have been taken from within the present known range of the species north of the Orange River, where Levaillant claims to have travelled." In other words, Macdonald believes that the type specimen came neither from the Olifants nor from the Orange, but from further north. The type was matched at Harvard against an Andersson skin from Otjimbingwe, which supports its northern origin as far as it goes, though

in this connection I would agree with Clancey (1959) that comparison of such old skins to determine the subspecies is of very doubtful value.

Unfortunately, too, all the other arguments which Macdonald advanced to support his case are either doubtful or have since been shown to be incorrect, as follows:

(i) *Eremomela icteropygialis* does occur on the Olifants River (Winterbottom, 1958).

(ii) It also occurs on or close to the Orange River below Upington, where it has been found at Bladgrond (Clancey, 1959), at two places in the Richtersveld (Winterbottom & Courtenay-Latimer, 1961) and at Aughrabies Falls.

(iii) It is not certain whether Levaillant collected the skin or not.

(iv) Granted that he did, the evidence that he crossed the Orange River is not conclusive. Grant (1957) has argued the case in favour of it, adducing the evidence of the skins of *Agapornis roseicollis*, *Rhinopomastus cyanomelas*, *Motacilla aguimp*, *Pterocles bicinctus* and *Trachyphonus vaillantii* as proof. To this Forbes (1958) has replied: "It is permissible to wonder . . . whether the ranges in the 18th century of the five species named are known with such certainty in that still unfrequented territory that they can now be used to establish positively the extent of Le Vaillant's travels in the north."

The answer, of course, is they are not so known and cannot be so used. Of the five species named, *Pterocles bicinctus* has now been recorded south of the Orange at Kuboos, in the Richtersveld, and *Motacilla aguimp* on the Olifants and even near Cape Town. Although the others have not so far been recorded south of the river, it may be observed that the Social Weaver *Philetarius socius*, on which *Agapornis roseicollis* depends for nest sites, occurs as far south as north-western Carnarvon. I may also add that my Ms. list for the Kenhardt District, which covers most of the country south of the Orange River in the critical area, includes only 85 species altogether; and that for Prieska, the adjoining District to the east, only 57 (as against, e.g., 216 for the better-known Philipstown and 201 for Little Namaqualand), emphasising our scanty knowledge even today of the bird population of that area. Acocks (1953) has shown, too, that much of the present desert country in those parts was covered with a more luxuriant vegetation in the past. Another species hitherto supposed not to occur south of the Orange, *Merops hirundineus*, is now known to extend 60 miles further south (Winterbottom, 1960) and the same may well apply to some, at least, of the species under consideration.

(v) Nobody claims that Levaillant reached as far north as Otjimbingwe and I agree with Clancey (1962) that the use of this place "as a sort of putative type locality of *E. i. icteropygialis*" serves only to confuse.

The upshot of all this is that we are now left with no external evidence worth considering as to the locality where the type of *Eremomela icteropygialis* was collected; and since Lafresnaye presumably had some reason for believing that it came from the Orange River, we must, I think, accept that as the type locality, as Clancey (1959) has advocated. White's note (1961) adds nothing new to the argument, except the statement that the emendation to the locality on the label of the type specimen was made

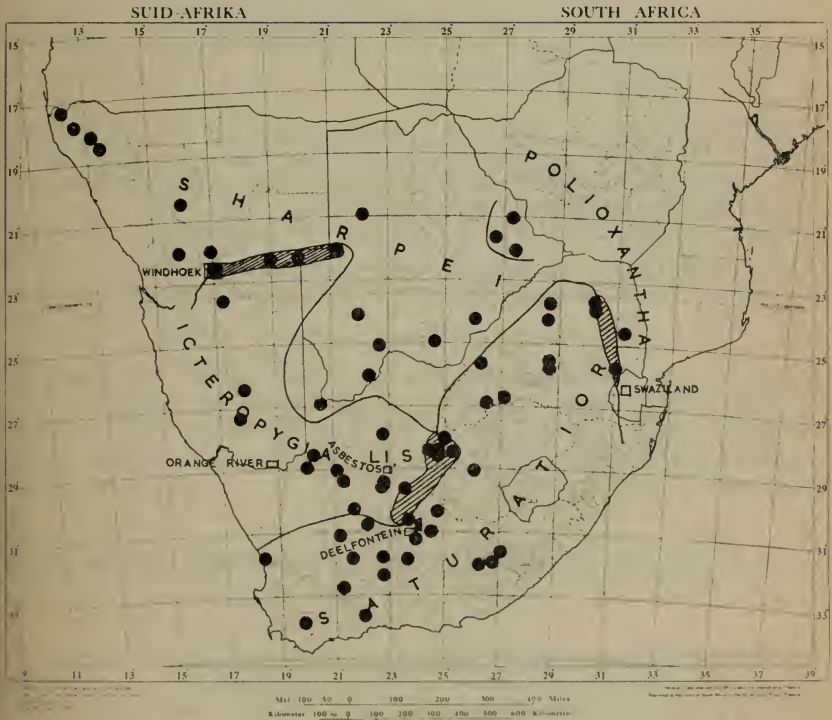
by Lafresnaye himself, which Macdonald does not say. I would therefore summarise the position as I see it in respect of the South African races of this species as follows:

1. *Eremomela icteropygialis saturator* O.—Grant

Eremomela saturator Ogilvie—Grant, Bull. B.O.C., 25, 1910: 120—Deelfontein.

Breast darkish grey, belly pale yellow.

Range: The Karoo of the Cape Province, north, in the west, to about Van Wyk's Vlei and Merriman and thence across the Orange Free State to the Transvaal. Intergrades with *E. i. icteropygialis* at Van Wyk's Vlei, Merriman, the Kimberley area and the western Orange Free State; and with *E. i. polioxantha* in the north-eastern Transvaal from Nelspruit to Mokeetsi. We may note that the north-eastern boundary of the range of this race is close enough to the 65°F. isotherm to suggest that there is some correlation with temperature.



South-western subspecies of *Eremomela icteropygialis*

Each dot represents a locality from which one or more specimens have been examined. Type localities of named races, whether valid or not, are indicated by open squares and named.

Area of intergradation between races are hatched.

2. *Eremomela icteropygialis icteropygialis* (Lafres.)

Sylvietta icteropygialis Lafresnaye, Rev. Zool., 1839: 258—Orange River

Synonym: Eremomela griseoflava perimacha Oberholser, Proc. Biol. Soc. Wash., 33, 1920: Asbestos Mts.

Breast pale grey, belly somewhat brighter yellow than in *E. i. saturator*.

Range: The Orange River basin from the Vaal confluence downstream, Gordonia, and most of Griqualand West, southern S. W. Africa. Intergrades with the next race between 22° and 23°S in South West Africa.

3. *Eremomela icteropygialis sharpei* Reichenow

Eremomela flaviventris sharpei Reichenow, Orn. Monatsb., 13, 1905: 25—Windhoek

Breast almost white; belly decidedly brighter than in *E. i. icteropygialis*.

Range: Northern South West Africa, the whole of Bechuanaland Protectorate except the north-east corner, and the Kalahari Gemsbok Park area of the northern Cape.

4. *Eremomela icteropygialis polioxantha* Sharpe

Eremomela polioxantha Sharpe, Cat. Bds. B.M., 7, 1883: 160—Swaziland.

Breast much as in *E. i. icteropygialis*, belly much richer yellow than in any of the preceding.

Range: as outlined in par. 3 above.

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A new name for *Bradypterus barratti major* (Roberts)

by S. A. PARKER

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If both *Caffrillas barratti* (Sharpe) and *Dumeticola major* Brooks are placed in the genus *Bradypterus*, following Delacour (*Ibis*, 1942, p. 512), then the name *Bradypterus barratti major* (Roberts) becomes a junior secondary homonym. I therefore propose:—

Bradypterus barratti lysis, nom. nov. for *Caffrillas barratti major* Roberts, Ann. Transvaal Mus., viii, p. 234, 1922—Wakkerstroom, Transvaal.

= *Bradypterus barratti major*, not

Dumeticola major Brooks, *Journ. As. Soc. Bengal*, 41, p. 77, 1872—Kashmir

= *Bradypterus major major*.